MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

NOAA

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION

HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION

July 2002

GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS MITIGATION SUMMIT

On June 25, the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) held a Mitigation Summit attended by federal and state regulatory agencies. Each of the six New England states were well represented. Opening remarks were made by Col. Osterndorf, the former District Commander, followed by an overview of the mitigation report "Wetland Restoration, Creation, and Enhancement in New England Under Oversight of the New England District," a summary of the New England Districts mitigation study, and an overview of the Mitigation Task Force's work. Mitigation recommendations drafted by the Task Force were presented, followed by discussion. The Summit concluded with a signing ceremony in support of the Task Force's Recommendations. Modifications to the recommendations are currently being discussed; a final draft is expected this winter. **(Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)**

COMPENSATORY MITIGATION FOR TEMPORAL LOSS OF HABITAT FUNCTIONS

Final EFH conservation recommendations for the Hubline Gas Pipeline were submitted to the

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on July 31, and will be submitted to the ACOE. In addition to extensive pre- and post-construction monitoring, habitat restoration along the right of way, and compensatory mitigation for unavoidable impacts on living marine resources, NOAA Fisheries has recommended compensatory mitigation for the temporal loss of habitat functions and values. The ACOE's study of mitigation projects in the New England District (December 2001) identified the temporal loss of wetland functions as a component of compensatory mitigation which needs to be addressed. The extent and diversity of impacts associated with the pipeline project provides an opportunity to support and justify the need to compensate for the temporal loss of habitat functions. How this recommendation will advance in the permit process is yet unknown. **(Sean.McDermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)**

NEW BEDFORD HARBOR TRUSTEE COUNCIL MEDIA EVENT

On July 10, the Trustee Council hosted a media event to update the New Bedford media on the restoration accomplishments benefitting the natural resources injured by the PCB contamination in New Bedford Harbor as well as the local communities. The media first received a presentation which highlighted many of the 28 different restoration projects being implemented through funds released by the Trustee Council. To date the Council has released more than $7.0 million for the various projects which address restoration priorities for marshes/wetlands, habitat, water quality, living resources, endangered species, and recreation areas. This was followed by a tour of several of the restoration sites that represented several of the priorities. The media were taken to the New Bedford reservoir in Acushnet where the Council has funded a land purchase (to prevent development) and a fishway reconstruction to benefit river herring. This was followed by a tour of the site of a former building materials firm where a partnership between the Environmental Protection Agency, the City of New Bedford, and the Trustee Council will restore and enhance saltmarsh and construct a park. The final stop was a tour of the Winsegansett Field Station, a 160-acre property purchased with Council funds and the site of future habitat restoration activities. The Council hopes to make this an annual event. **(Jack.Terrill@NOAA.GOV, 978/ 281-9136)**

NMEA 2002 CONFERENCE - THE RACE TO HELL GATE

HCD helped staff a NOAA exhibit booth at the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) conference in New London, CT. NMEA is affiliated with the National Science Teachers Association and includes professionals with backgrounds in education, science, business, government, and marine research. This year's theme for the conference was, "The Race to Hell Gate - Estuaries to the Abyss," focusing primarily on Long Island Sound. The conference sessions thus were centered around this urban sea and the problems facing it. NOAA was well represented and talks given included those on invasive aquatic plants, habitat restoration, eelgrass transplanting methods, Marine Protected Areas, and resources of the NOAA Central Library among many other presentations. **(Jill.Ortiz@NOAA.GOV, 978/ 281-9312)**

JAMES J. HOWARD MARINE SCIENCES LABORATORY, HIGHLANDS, NJ 07732

CHESAPEAKE BAY DREDGED DISPOSAL SITES

Stan Gorski and John Nichols attended the meetings of the Dredged Material Management Plan

(DMMP) Management Committee on July 17, and the Bay Enhancement Working Group (BEWG) on July 25, both held in Baltimore. The matrix and recommendations for long and short term disposal options developed by the BEWG and approved by the DMMP were passed on to the Governor's Task Force Executive Committee and accepted. A portion of both meetings was devoted to use of Parsons Island as a disposal site and some hydrological information produced by Maryland Environmental Services. Additional discussion centered on the critical need for more disposal sites in the inner harbor. **(Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037 or John Nichols, 410/ 226-5771)**

DELAWARE BASIN BASIN FISHERIES: SEASONAL RESTRICTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Habitat staff is coordinating with the Delaware Basin Fisheries Technical Committee and the Philadelphia District Corps of Engineers to update the seasonal restrictions for eight sections of Delaware Bay and the Delaware River that would protect fishery resources. Federal and state representatives from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware contributed their expertise to produce a comprehensive document that will be used early in the planning stages of projects in order to minimize impacts on fishery resources from activities such as pile driving, blasting/overboard disposal, pipeline hydraulic dredging, bucket dredging, and hopper dredging. The final draft of the updated document was presented to the committee at the July 25 quarterly meeting held in Hancock, New York. **(Stanley.W.Gorski@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3037 or Anita.Riportella@noaa.gov, 732-872-3116)**

PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS BARNEGAT BAY ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT

Habitat staff has been participating at meetings with state and federal agencies for the development of a restoration plan within the Barnegat Bay study area. After consideration of 23 sites, Barnegat Lighthouse, Bayville Lagoon, Stafford Forge, Oyster Creek, Flat Island, and two abandoned lagoons have been selected as restoration sites. Restoration activities include installation of fish ladders, excavation of new channels to increase tidal flow to ponds and wetlands, and improve habitat quality. The selected plans were chosen based upon cost and technical and environmental factors. **(Anita.Riportella@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3116)**

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DREDGING PLAN COMPLETED FOR PORT OF NY&NJ CONTRACT REACH 8

Coordination with the New York District ACOE, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the State of New Jersey, and NMFS has resulted in completion of a seasonally constrained dredging plan for the deepening of the federal navigation channels leading to Port Elizabeth and Newark. The agreement calls for the dredging to be undertaken in a set pattern of excavations within identified project sub-reaches. The patterns (contracts) for the work are configured to allow uninterrupted (sequential) dredging of the project reaches and still afford embryo and larval stages of species using the vicinity, adequate protection from the impacts of dredging, blasting, and rock removal. In the Kill Van Kull (between Bayonne, NJ, and Staten Island, NY), the Arthur Kill (separating Staten Island from New Jersey) and Port Elizabeth and Newark (in

Newark Bay), the design focus has been on the habitat used by winter flounder. Winter flounder are a federally managed species under the Magnuson - Stevens Act and have designated essential fish habitat. The species spawn between February and April in waters typically less than twenty feet when in estuarine locations. Because their embryos are somewhat adhesive and maturation can take almost a month, protecting this lifestage is of critical importance. Burial of the less than a millimeter diameter eggs by as little as one third can be fatal. Because dredging can generate high levels of sediment for protracted periods of time and can be scheduled, it is a focus for EFH consultations. **(Karen.Greene@noaa.gov, 732/ 872-3039 or Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov ,203/ 882-6504)**

SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE PROJECT RECEIVES COASTAL CONSISTENCY

The Mohegan Indian Nation moved closer to implementing the most extensive and intensive aquaculture operation in Connecticut waters with the receipt of their Coastal Consistency determination. The operation will include floating, longline, and bottom retention systems as well as upwellers and land-based hatchery systems located on seven shellfish lease sites and waterfront properties from Niantic Bay to the Rhode Island border. For more than a year, the applicants have been working on obtaining the necessary permits and authorizations to implement the Mohegan Aquaculture LLC plan. A significant portion of the effort was related to the establishment of procedures needed for the review and authorization. The actual protocols and coordination framework were not fully in place when the initial application materials were submitted for review. However, the protocols developed in the permit review process for this application has smoothed the way for subsequent aquaculture proponents seeking authorizations in the State of Connecticut. Now that the protocols have been developed and implemented, permitting time for projects of this nature has fallen from over one year to less than two months. **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)**

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY PROPOSALS POISED TO SWEEP THE NORTHEAST

Meeting regional energy needs has begun to inspire interest in developing non-conventional domestic sources in the northeast US. In particular, staff are being introduced to a variety of proposals, notably offshore windmill farms. Typically, project proponents are considering concepts that include 50 to 200 electricity-generating turbine units at sites from at least Cape Cod to New Jersey. These monopile-mounted units generally are capable of generating 2.5 to 3.0 MW(e) each. Rising more than 60 meters (200 feet) above the sea surface and clustered in grids with half kilometer spacings, proposals for such facilities recently have been encouraged by the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), the regional electric distribution operator. In fact, LIPA is interested in encouraging and facilitating the development of up to 5,200 MW(e) generation from such offshore windfarms. We understand that the facilities generally would be sited in waters less than 30 meters (100 feet) deep at parcels more than three miles from shore. LIPA, which is developing much of the information needed for the windfarms and connective cabling, has identified the largest potential development sites off Brooklyn and Nassau County in the Atlantic. Simultaneously, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island are hosting designers seeking sites for wave driven, electric generation. Typical of the proposals is a system invented in Australia. That wave driven system converts the energy in the surface component of the wave form to mechanical energy to drive a turbine. A similar design is presently under construction in the Pacific Northwest. When these proposals are added to the unprecedented number of utility line installations being proposed throughout the region it becomes apparent that

the we are in the process of reducing the dependence on petroleum and coal forms of fossil fuels. (One of the windfarms plans to produce hydrogen gas for use in fuel cells as its sole product.) **(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)**

BLUE CIRCLE CEMENT PROPOSES INTAKE REPAIRS

Blue Circle Cement currently operates a cement plant in the Town of Coeymans, Albany County, New York. The plant presently draws cooling and process water from the Hudson River via two source locations. Non-contact cooling water, storm water runoff, and effluent from a domestic wastewater treatment plant subsequently is discharged to Coeyman's Creek via an outfall. The applicants are considering an intake modification to address thermal discharges that exceed limits prescribed in their State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permit. The subject project is in response to a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Order of Consent. Under the new operating plan, Blue Circle will attempt to meet its thermal limits by reducing the amount of water recycled through the Coeymans Creek outfall and increasing the amount of water pumped into the plant from the Hudson. Repairs to the intake will be necessary. The applicant is proposing to replace the waterward terminus of the intake pipe and stabilize it with approximately 1500 grout bags (filled with 1/2 to 2/3 cubic feet of concrete mix per bag). Staff will work with the New York District ACOE to ensure that project impacts to the endangered shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*) are avoided and/or minimized to the extent practicable. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)**

GREENE COUNTY BUSINESS PARK

The Greene county Industrial Development Agency is seeking state and federal approvals to develop a 208 acre site on the eastern side of Route 9W in Coxsackie, New York. The development would impact 2.06 acres of waters of the U.S. and some 3.5 acres of isolated wetlands in the Coxsackie Creek watershed. Members of the US Congress, as well as State and local representatives, have voiced their support of the proposal for its planned economic benefits. Due to existing workloads, staff will be unable to participate in both the project review and mitigation development phases. **(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)**

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SLAUGHTER BEACH, DE, NOURISHMENT

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Division of Soil and Water (DSW), proposes to replenish the shore at Slaughter Beach, a residential community on Delaware Bay. The borrow material, approximately 115,000 cubic yards, will be dredged from an offshore borrow site in the Bay. Although DSW has documented that previously used borrow sites infill within a year, questions have been raised concerning the long term impacts on estuarine habitat and biota. For example, former borrow sites at Broadkill Beach, another Delaware community, developed gaseous sediments, the nature of which, as well as the effects on biota, are unknown. If the gaseous deposits are caused by hydrogen sulphide, which is toxic to biota, the degraded conditions will inhibit biological recruitment. DSW has agreed to monitor previous borrow areas at Slaughter Beach to determine the nature of the gaseous deposits, the persistence of these deposits, and the condition of the biological communities. These data will

be compared with those from adjacent undisturbed reference areas with similar sediment grain sizes. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**

OCEAN CITY, MD, BEACH NOURISHMENT

The Baltimore District ACOE is presently planning to identify offshore sand borrow sources to meet the 50 year replenishment needs for this Maryland seashore resort and adjacent areas on Assateague Island. Approximately 1 million cubic yards of sand is required every 4 years, exclusive of contingency needs associated with major storms, to meet their needs. Three relict shoals have been identified for further studies, including fisheries surveys. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**

SANDBRIDGE, VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, BEACH NOURISHMENT

The Norfolk District ACOE is proposing to remove 1.5 million cubic yards of material from Sandbridge Shoal offshore of Virginia Beach to replenish approximately 5 miles of beach. The proposal entails removal of similar sand volumes every 4 years for 50 years to meet project needs. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**

HABITAT SUITABILITY MODELING

Modeling in the Delaware Coastal Zone: NOAA/NOS, in conjunction with the Delaware Coastal Program, is identifying and assessing important fish habitats in the Atlantic Ocean along the Delaware Coast. Data on physical habitat parameters were compiled and mapped, including temperature, depth, and sediment type. Eight species were modeled, with the emphasis on Council managed species, to determine spatial distribution of sand resources, fisheries resources, and predicted habitat suitability. The results will help identify optimum sand borrow sites and predict potential biological impacts on Essential Fish Habitats. **(Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5771)**